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SAO PAULO 0795

SUBJECT: Hunger Strike Continues

REF: SAO PAULO 0726; 0740; A-45

1. Hunger strike by 35 political prisoners, including three

Dominicans, continues in several prisons around the state.

Attorney for Dominicans and several other prisoners, Mario Simas
strike

(protect source), told Congen today that ~~strike~~ had lasted 29 days

and prisoners were determined to hold out indefinitely. All of

them are in very weak condition, however, and some are very

near death. Central issue of strike now is return of prisoners

from isolated prisons to which they were sent early last month.

Simas said removal of Dominicans to isolated prison "500 miles"

from São Paulo was strictly illegal and that he had entered

process in the courts calling for their return. The judge ruled

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against defendants and explained to Simas that in some instances politics had to supersede the law. Case was argued and decided behind closed doors for "reasons of national security." Simas commented wryly that the country's security must be on shaky legs if simply motion of this kind had to be heard in secrecy. He was not rpt not optimistic that return of prisoners would be achieved or strike resolved soon.

2. Simas has represented a number of political prisoners, particularly those connected with the church, over the past several years. He said there was no indication that arbitrary practices by security forces and courts in dealing with political prisoners were moderating. He referred to São Paulo Bishops' Declaration at Brodosqui (São Paulo 0740) as accurate statement of current situation, and observed that São Paulo bishops had now been joined by others in the country to bring total to more than 80 bishops (out of 242 in Brazil) adhering to Brodosqui Declaration. Issue of

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mistreatment of prisoners had already caused sharp break between church and state, and the church was now unified, with only few exceptions, in its opposition to the system. Simas said this was the opinion of Dom Ivo Lorscheiter, Secretary General of the National Conference of Bishops, with whom he spoke last week. He said Dom Ivo was encouraged church's position on this issue was beginning to have an impact in other sectors of the Brazilian community.

Comment: Hunger strike and Brodosqui Declaration are beginning to attract some attention in São Paulo but most Paulistas, including the politicians, are still apathetic.

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